

ALTERNATIVE C: LOWER MISSISSIPPI DELTA HERITAGE CENTERS

In their final report to the president and Congress in 1990 the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission made recommendations for the creation and development of centers for the preservation of the cultural, historical, and literary heritage of the Delta region. The report also included recommendations for establishing a Delta Region Native American Heritage and Cultural Center and a Delta Region African-American Heritage and Cultural Center with additional satellite centers or museums linked throughout the Delta region.

This alternative, based on the commission's recommendations and sections 1103 and 1104 of Public Law 103-433 (Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiatives), proposes the establishment of seven heritage/cultural centers in the Delta region. A heritage/cultural center would be located in each state of the study area (southern Illinois, southeastern Missouri, western Kentucky, western Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana) and would focus on interpreting the "Stories of the Delta" as represented in this study's 10 concepts.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

As in alternatives A and B the 10 concepts based on the "Stories of the Delta" would be the basis for the visitor experience and interpretation at each of the seven heritage centers.

ORIENTATION/INFORMATION

Each state would use a variety of media to alert travelers to the location of the Delta Heritage Center in their state. Brochures, maps, and video and audio tapes would be available at tourist information centers along the primary highway systems. In addition each state would include information about the center at their Internet site on the World Wide Web. Signs installed at key locations could also direct visitors and residents to the heritage centers.

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

Interpretation

Interpretation of the Stories of the Delta and the concepts that reflect them would be presented within the context of the entire Delta region at each heritage center. Each center would feature an overview of Delta heritage and would also present material on the Delta heritage of that particular state. It would be important for the centers to coordinate and exchange exhibits and interpretive material to ensure visitors receive a regional perspective of the Delta. A variety of interpretive media, including films, interactive computer programs, exhibits, brochures, and walking trails around the center would be used to convey to visitors the broad context of Delta heritage.

It is suggested that once visitors reviewed the interpretive programs at the heritage center they would be directed to other museums, historic sites, trails, or natural resource areas throughout the Delta to receive more in-depth information about a particular facet of Delta heritage. Driving, hiking, biking and/or boating tours could be developed in conjunction with the heritage centers and could direct visitors along the levees and historic trails and roads, through its towns and cities, and particularly leading visitors to the great body of water of myth and legend — the Mississippi River.

Education

Educational programs developed in conjunction with the Delta Heritage Centers could be used in local schools and communities to develop in children and adult residents an appreciation for and pride in their Delta heritage. Educational outreach programs could encourage residents to participate in oral history and folk life programs enriching the interpretive programs at the centers and preserving heritage resources for future generations.

An educational program could be developed that would provide opportunities for all levels

of education and participation. The curriculum could be designed to be used in a variety of ways. It might be used as the framework for a thematic, cross curricular unit on Delta heritage. Individual lessons might be focused on oral histories and/or folk ways. Lessons could be designed to stand alone and might be taught in any order. Lessons and activities could be initiated at the schools or at the heritage centers and would employ a number of different teaching methods to address the need of the students. The curriculum would be flexible, innovative, interactive, and creative.

RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

The Delta's natural, cultural, and historical resources are the core reasons for establishing seven Delta heritage centers. The centers would showcase the rich variety of resources found in the Delta and should include information on the importance of preserving and protecting them so that future generations might experience and understand the region's rich past.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Historic and cultural resources provide an important link to the past and are key to understanding the present and the future. It is suggested that each heritage center be established in a historic structure. The structure could be rehabilitated or adapted for use as a heritage center.

Since this alternative focuses on a single heritage center in each state as a heritage tourism strategy, resource preservation and protection strategies would be primarily programmatic and might take the form of technical assistance and/or educational programs.

Historic preservation programs could be developed in conjunction with the heritage centers and might include technical assistance in preparing National Register nominations, conducting resource surveys, and/or initiating oral history programs. Educational programs might address appropriate treatment and

storage of artifact collections, appropriate treatment of historic structures in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior standards, and/or developing exhibits at historic sites or local museums.

Natural Resources

The Lower Mississippi Delta provides habitat and ecological support for a wide variety of flora, fauna and aquatic species. The Mississippi River forms the most important bird and waterfowl migration corridor on the continent while the river bottoms comprise north America's largest wetland area and bottom land hardwood forest. Since this alternative focuses on a single heritage center in each state as a heritage tourism strategy, natural resource conservation strategies would be primarily programmatic and might take the form of technical assistance and/or educational programs.

Natural resource conservation programs could be developed in conjunction with the heritage centers and might include outreach programs, brochures, and/or demonstration projects in partnership with public or private landowners. Education programs might address the importance of the Delta's migration corridor and wetlands to the nation and the world or present a variety of conservation strategies whose goals include ensuring future generations enjoyment of the rich natural heritage of the Delta.

FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

This alternative proposes the construction of seven Delta heritage centers — one in each of the states in the study area. It is suggested that the centers be situated in historic structures if possible. If a structure of sufficient size could not be located and/or made available reasonably, new construction is proposed.

Congress would authorize the development of the seven heritage centers and would appropriate funds for their construction. The secretary of the interior would be authorized to establish criteria, in consultation with other concerned federal agencies and state repre-

sentatives, for location, design, and development of interpretive media and exhibits for the centers. The secretary would be responsible for overseeing construction of the facilities.

MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Lower Mississippi Delta Heritage Center Task Force

Under this management approach seven Delta heritage centers would be constructed in the Delta. Congress would establish a Lower Mississippi Delta Heritage Center Task Force to oversee the project. Once funds were appropriated by Congress, the secretary of the interior, as chair of the task force, would be responsible for planning, design, and construction of the centers. Once the centers were completed and interpretive media and exhibits were in place, the centers would become the responsibility of each state to staff, manage, and maintain.

It is envisioned that after the seven centers were completed, the task force would still be needed to ensure that programs and information would be coordinated between the seven centers.

Membership

To accomplish this joint undertaking of planning, design, and construction Congress would establish a Delta Heritage Center Task Force whose membership would include federal agencies and state government representatives and would reflect the cultural diversity of the region. One representative from each state would be appointed to the task force by the governors. The secretary of the interior, or his representative, would act as chairperson and would be responsible for ensuring completion of the task force's work. Representatives from other concerned federal agencies would also be appointed and would bring the number of members of the task force to 15 working members. The task force would develop and maintain a communication network and solicit input from the public at the appropriate times during the planning and design phases of the project.

Functions

The Delta Heritage Center Task Force would be responsible for: (1) developing criteria for site selection and design guide lines for development of the heritage centers; (2) communicating with and seeking input from Delta residents during the planning and design phases of the project; (3) overseeing design and construction of the seven heritage centers; and (4) turning the centers over to the governors of the respective states at the completion of the project.

Funding

Congress would authorize and appropriate funds for the planning, design, and construction of the seven heritage centers. Once the centers were complete the states would assume responsibility for maintaining, managing, and staffing the centers.

Cost Estimates

Land and/or structures would be donated by the states. In recognition of budgetary constraints and fiscal limitations for federal funding, a maximum of \$3 million in federal dollars per heritage/cultural center would be expended for this alternative. Each center would include an orientation/information desk, lobby, rest rooms, interpretive/education exhibits, a theater, office space, and adequate parking.

The funds for the centers might be allocated in one of several ways including: grants to each state for planning, design, and construction; funding match requirements; planning, design, and construction by the National Park Service and turning over the centers to the states upon completion; or matching requirements of funding and in-kind services. For any of these options federal funding would remain \$3 million per center. There would be no cost to the federal government to staff and maintain the facility, this would be the responsibility of each state when they assumed management responsibilities for the centers.